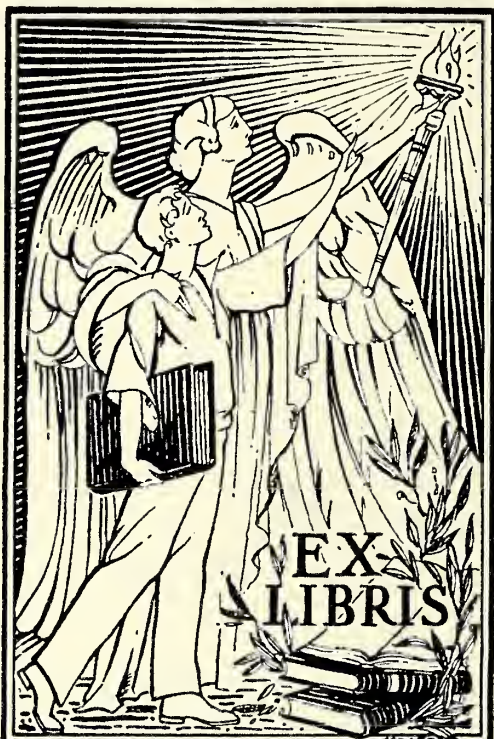


Jimmy Sakamoto
The Spirit of Bushido.
Vig. Hosokawa.

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The Spirit Of Bushido

—BY—

WM. HOSOKAWA

In the event of a Japanese-American war would there be loyalty to America in the hearts of the Oriental Americans living on American soil? Jimmy Sakamoto, blind editor, and leader of 80,000 second-generation Japanese living in the United States, gives an interesting answer to this question.

SIGHTLESS in a calling that places a premium on eyesight, blind James Y. Sakamoto sits at his typewriter, agile fingers tapping out stories and editorials for his weekly newspaper. Sakamoto is editor and publisher of the Japanese-American Courier in Seattle, Washington, circulated mainly among American-born and Educated Japanese along the Pacific coast.

Sakamoto with but a slight journalistic background, became a publisher only after his eyesight started to fail, nearly ten years ago.

One night in 1927, two athletes with sweaty bodies glistening under floodlights, pummelled each other for an inconsequential purse before a rabid New York boxing crowd. Suddenly the smaller man staggered before a blow to his temple. That blow ended Jimmy Sakamoto's career as a professional boxer, for it caused ultimate blindness. It was that night James Sakamoto determined to become an editor. Now he is leader of 80,000 Americans of Japanese parentage. Sakamoto is a leader, not only editorially, but as national president of the Japanese-American citizens' league, a union of 39 chapters principally along the Pacific Coast, organized for the promotion of better citizenship among American-born Japanese. There are more than seven thousand members of the organization.

"The Japanese in America are facing an unusually difficult situation," Sakamoto explains. "They are American citizen by birth, trained in American schools, and im-



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JAMES Y. SAKAMOTO

"Nobody is going to stop me."

bued with the best American tradition. But because of a racial mask which they can never remove, their efforts toward Americanization are often looked on with suspicion, and barriers of foolish prejudice and discrimination face them. While a descendant of European stock can merely drop an accent and be accepted as an American, a citizen of Oriental ancestry finds it impossible to fit as smoothly into the picture."

It has been the aim of The Courier as well

as of the Japanese-American Citizens' league to remove suspicion, and encourage understanding by proving to the public the young Japanese are not a hyphenated group, but are as American as any others on our soil.

"There can be no such thing as internationalism until there is intelligent nationalism, which in our case is intelligent Americanism," declares Sakamoto. He peers intently as he speaks, as if trying to see through his sightless eyes. There is no hint of the drive that is Jimmy Sakamoto's in his 135-pound body. His shoulders are sloped a little too sharply for masculine symmetry, but they bespeak the power which carried him near the crest in the boxing world after a brilliant high school athletic career.

Jimmy Sakamoto was born of immigrant parents in Seattle on March 22, 1903, and lived the life of any active American boy. It was at the age of 13 that his first citizenship lesson was impressed on him, not in the classroom, but from his father, an alien in-

eligible to citizenship.

In those days when war raged in Europe, there was talk of an American-Japanese war. In the childish minds of Jimmy and his playmates lurked the question of what to do in the case of a conflict. America was their country, but Japan was the land of their parents.

One day, his father, former member of the Japanese Imperial navy, called his son.

"What would you do in case of war between your country and Japan," he asked.

Jimmy pondered a moment, and child-like, chose the easiest way out. "I wouldn't fight," he declared. "I could go to Canada, or to Mexico."

His father was gentle but firm. "If you did that," he explained, "you would be a coward. That is not the spirit of Bushido, the creed of the Japanese Samurai. Bushido teaches loyalty to a single master, to one's liege lord. You have no liege lord, but you have your country. The spirit of Bushido as I want you to know it means loyalty to the United States, your native country.

"I may have to fight against you if there happens to be a war," his father said softly. "And you may have to fight against me. But that is the spirit of Bushido. Let that loyalty be your contribution to your native country."

This incident, says Sakamoto, impressed itself indelibly. A few years later, in 1920, a congressional committee on immigration and naturalization passed through Seattle on an investigation tour. Jimmy Sakamoto, among others, was called as witness. The confident, aggressive answers he gave are on record in congressional files. Here is a sample of the questions fired by members of the committee, and the prompt answers of the 17-year-old boy.

Q. You know, don't you that you are claimed as a citizen by Japan, and also by the United States?

A. I don't care, I was born here, in the United States.

Q. Is it your intention to remain an American citizen or be a Japanese citizen?

A. Why shouldn't I remain an American? I was born here. Why should I go back there? This is my home.

Q. You intend to remain an American citizen?

A. Nobody is going to stop me.

When doctors declared he would soon be blind because of a detached retina resulting from that blow in the prize ring, Sakamoto hurried home to Seattle from New York, and established the Japanese-American Courier, the first Japanese-American journal entirely in English. His eyesight was growing weaker daily.

At first he wrote out his editorials with a brush in large letters, but in time even his bold script became indiscernible in the descending fog. Now he uses the touch system of typing and has his stories read back to him for correction.

Sakamoto has made his paper a success. At first it was a tiny paper, but through the years of the economic depression, The Courier has shown a steady gain in size and circulation, until it is now a full-sized four-page weekly.

In bold type under the masthead of his paper is the statement of policy:

"The Courier, established January 1, 1928, shall be published with a close regard to the general principle of Truth, Justice and Tolerance, for: in the associations between nations as among mankind, truth is the compelling force of justice, the administration of which shall respond to a just call of tolerance."

In regard to the work of the Japanese-American Citizens' league, the efforts toward assimilation of a group that has been termed unassimilable, Sakamoto declares:

"Our parents pioneered their way to the United States. We are the pioneer American generation, with a contribution to make to American life, just as any racial group has. We will not become a lost generation, nor will we lose the fine points of our Japanese heritage. It is our resolve to take the laudable features of Japan, and harmonize them into American life as our contribution."

The average age of the 80,000 second generation Japanese in the United States today is estimated at between 14 and 16. The parent generation is past middle age. Already the American-born outnumber the elders. Filling the gap between the youths and their parents are the leaders of Sakamoto's type.

Sakamoto is married to a kindly, efficient little woman who not only runs his household, but is business manager of the newspaper. Their only child, a daughter, is learning her abc's in kindergarten.

Throughout the years of Jimmy's long fight it has been a burning idealism that has lighted the way for the blind editor.

It's nice to have an easy time
With life all free from pain;
But if I had no hills to climb
There'd be no heights to gain.

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